

A Party Reborn: the Democrats of Iowa, 1950-1974

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Book Reviews

Michael D. Gibson, Book Review Editor

A Party Reborn: The Democrats of Iowa, 1950-1974, by James C. Larew. Iowa City: Iowa State Historical Department, 1980. pp. 216. Photographs, index. \$12.00.

James Larew's *A Party Reborn: The Democrats of Iowa, 1950-1974* covers a very significant period in the development of meaningful two-party competition in a state dominated for many decades by the Republican party. His narrative includes a brief historical account of Iowa's nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century political reaction to Populism and Progressivism, emphasizing its occasional independent voting tendencies while maintaining generally one-party Republican control. The significant political developments of the 1940s and 1950s are described in a chapter entitled "Urbanization and the Silent Democrats." This portion treats the long record of defeats suffered under the state Democratic chairmanship of Jake More. The reasons for More's long survival as state chairman and the new issues such as legislative reapportionment, increased industrialization, Farm Bureau and Iowa Manufacturers Association ascendancy in Republican politics, and labor dissatisfaction which set the stage for a fundamental political transformation in the state are discussed. Chapter 3 describes the emergence of a Democratic-Labor coalition and effective party organization in Polk County under the leadership of Wade Clarke and Lex Hawkins, Democratic county chairmen. Chapter 4, entitled "Democrats Reborn: The Rise of Harold Hughes," deals in part with the era of Governor Herschel Loveless and primarily with the emergence of Harold Hughes as the Democratic party's chief and highly successful standard bearer. The final fifth chapter treats the development of Democratic organization and the senatorial victories

of Dick Clark and John Culver, who are described as successors of Harold Hughes to the leadership of the Iowa Democratic party.

Larew's work is a straight-forward narrative. His book fulfills an exceedingly important task in preserving, while many of the main contributors to these developments were available for consultation and interviews, the account of this major political transformation. The narrative is, however, rather uneven. There is a strong tendency to identify the major responsibility for the transformation to a limited number of elected leaders, to identify Iowa Democratic resurgence as largely an urban phenomenon, to overemphasize organization, and to imply a degree of permanence to the political transformation. Harold Hughes obviously was a tremendous influence in the era of these developments, but his forte was issue development and public opinion leadership, not party organization. Among the elected leaders discussed fully there is one inexplicable omission. Congressman Neal Smith, while mentioned briefly, is the single Iowa Democratic leader who served longer than any others in the era since 1950 and by 1981 is the only one still in office. Smith combined attentive concern for party organization and restrained, but significant, leadership on public policy issues. Smith's success reflected his keen understanding that the transformation of Iowa political values was by no means simply a function of urbanization.

In balance, Larew has made a solid contribution. Hopefully he will spark a trend toward contemporary investigation of fundamental party shifts.

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Iowa Takes to the Air, by Ann Holtgren Pellegrino. Sioux City, Iowa: Aerodrome Press, 1980. pp. xiii, 274. Photographs, notes, index. \$14.95.

Ann Holtgren Pellegrino's detailed and absorbing account of early aeronautics in Iowa is a boon to all students of the history of American flight technology. In Europe the airplane grew to maturity in a few great urban centers, and every major flight was a news event to be reported in the aeronautical journals of the period. As a result, the record of early European aviation is clear and relatively straight-forward. Not so in the United States where aeronautical progress was made in backlots, barns, and garages in small towns scattered from

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